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Abstract

Most scholars and pundits usually take for granted that Korea-Japan relations are peculiar in the sense that the dominant effect of historical animosity distorts their relations so much that no IR theory can explain their relations properly. This observation is neither theoretically nor empirically well-founded. The scholarship on Korea-Japan relations is largely divided into the two schools: the historical animosity school and the Realist school. However, this tendency for dichotomization itself prevents researchers from grasping reality. In fact, historical animosity is inseparably intertwined with *Realpolitik* consideration. Therefore, Korea-Japan relations are explainable in terms of Realism as broadly understood.

Present State of Scholarship on Korea-Japan Relations: Dichotomy

Since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi retired in September 2006, we have witnessed a more assertive Japan searching for a new identity under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's leadership. Abe's cabinet is making efforts to amend the so-called "Peace Constitution," moving toward becoming a normal state with full-fledged military prowess.

Abe has set out to eliminate the taboos that he believes undermine Japan's independence. He argues that since Japan has been peaceful, a good neighbor, and a contributor to international peace for over 60 years now; there is no more need for war guilt. In his view, it is time for Japan to become a normal country, which means adopting a homegrown constitution, promoting patriotism in schools, and accepting a greater role in international security.¹ This development negatively affects the relationship between Japan and the neighboring states, including China and South Korea, largely due to the controversy over Japan's handling of certain history-related issues, while this new development is viewed by many U.S. experts as positively affecting U.S.-Japan relations.²

In retrospect, the year 2005 was meant by both the Japanese and the South Korean governments to be 'Japan-Korea Friendship Year,' which marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic normalization. Accordingly, both states have been making coordinated efforts for various cultural, academic and sports exchanges. Seemingly, bilateral relations had warmed to their best in decades with 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan as a turning point. Japan and the ROK also share common threats, such as, North Korea's nuclear arms program. Therefore, they have good reasons for improving relations. Nevertheless, in the history of Korea-Japan relations the year of 2005 will be recorded as one of the most tumultuous years due to the damaging impact of bilateral disputes over such issues as Dokdo³ (South Korea-controlled small islets) in the East Sea,⁴ Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine,⁵ Japan's history and civics text-

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1. Richard Katz and Peter Ennis, "How Able Is Abe?" *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2007), pp. 80-81.
 2. For a positive view of Japan's assertiveness, see Michael J. Green, "Japan Is Back: Why Tokyo's New Assertiveness Is Good for Washington," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2007), pp. 142-147.
 3. *Dokdo* (meaning Lonely Island) in Korean is called *Takeshima* (meaning Bamboo Island) in Japanese.

books the ROK sees as whitewashing wartime atrocities conducted by Japanese soldiers, etc.⁶ The two states should have been much more cooperative against common threats, but in reality the diplomatic row reached a seriously damaging level especially after Japan's Shimane Prefectural Assembly passed an ordinance designating Feb. 22 as 'Takeshima Day' to mark the date in 1905 when Japan first claimed the little outcrop. This kind of seemingly anomalous phenomenon out of Realist expectations—frequent frictions even when they share common threats—is not limited to the post-Cold War era.

Korea-Japan relations showed similar fluctuations during the Cold War era as well when the level of common threats the two states perceived was much higher than that during the post-Cold War era. Therefore, the enigmatic variations of cooperation/frictions in Korea-Japan relations present a simple but challenging puzzle: When is their relationship more cooperative and when is it more conflictive?⁷

A majority of experts analyze Korea-Japan relations in terms of historical animosity, focusing on the conflictive side of the relationship. Historians and political scientists employing a holistic approach usually adopt a descriptive/narrative approach. They have provided a detailed

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4. The East Sea is called *Tonghae* in Korea while it is called "Sea of Japan" in Japan.
 5. Yasukuni Shrine, which served as a spiritual apparatus for wartime mobilization during Japan's war years in the 1930s and 1940s, enshrines those who died for the Japanese state during the war, including wartime Prime Minister Hideki Tojo and 13 other Class-A war criminals. Unlike Koizumi, Emperor Hirohito stopped visiting Yasukuni after the Class A war criminals were enshrined there in 1978 and Emperor Akihito has snubbed calls from right-wingers to visit the shrine so far.
 6. Other issues include "comfort women" (wartime sex slaves for the Japanese soldiers), wartime forced laborers, and legal rights of the Korean residents in Japan, fisheries, etc.
 7. Victor D. Cha is credited for presenting this puzzle first and attempting to provide a systematic explanation for it. Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999); "Alignment Despite Antagonism: Japan and Korea as Quasi-Allies," Ph.D. diss., Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, New York, 1994. For his related articles, see Victor D. Cha, "Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in East Asia," *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 44 (June 2000), pp. 261-269; "Hate, Power and Identity in Japan-Korea Security: Towards a Synthetic Material-Ideational Analytical Framework," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (November 2000), pp. 309-324; "Bridging the Gap: The Strategic Context of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty," *Korean Studies*, Vol. 20 (University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

diplomatic history of Japan-Korea relations full of conflictive incidents.⁸ They have also produced a large body of literature on Korean nationalism or the history of Korean independence movements. This kind of ‘descriptive-historical’ approach adopted by historians may not be satisfactory to the political scientists who are theory-conscious. But we need not only to “respect difference”⁹ between them but also to recognize each has his/her own role that is “too important to leave to the other”¹⁰ and the difference is to be appreciated more in light of cross-fertilization than for the purpose of mutual recrimination.

The persistent historical animosity indeed has affected Korea-Japan relations even since their diplomatic normalization in 1965, twenty years after the end of Japan’s colonial rule over Korea (1910-1945). Therefore, no wonder a majority of political scientists focus on the particular historical legacies negatively affecting the Korea-Japan relationship. Cooperation between Japan and South Korea could have been a normal consequence because their rational calculation of self-interests was compelling them to have a good relationship within the same bloc in the Cold War context. However, these analysts argue Japan and Korea have a ‘particular’ or ‘special’ historical relationship that cannot be understood from a rational choice perspective alone.¹¹

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8. For recent examples, Brian Bridges, *Japan and Korea in the 1990s: From Antagonism to Adjustment* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1993); Chae-Jin Lee, “U.S. and Japanese Policies toward Korea: Continuity and Change,” Hong Yung Lee and Chongwook Chung, ed., *Korean Options in a Changing International Order* (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley/ Korea Research Monograph 18: 1993); Chae-Jin Lee and Hideo Sato, ed., *U.S.-Japan Partnership in Conflict Management: The Case of Korea* (Claremont, California: The Keck Center for International and Strategic Studies, 1993); Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1985); Chae-Jin Lee and Hideo Sato, ed., *U.S. Policy Toward Japan and Korea: A Changing Influence Relationship* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1982); Hong N. Kim, “South Korea’s Relations with Japan,” Young C. Kim, ed., *Foreign Policies of Korea* (The Institute for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C./ Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyung Nam University, 1973).
9. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, “Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997).
10. Jack S. Levy, “Too Important to Leave to the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997).
11. There have been hot debates on how to approach Asian studies in general. For classical views opposing rational choice frameworks for Asia studies, see Chalmers Johnson, “Political Science and East Asian

They stress the idiosyncratic nature of the relationship, which without ‘burden of history’¹² should have been much more cooperative, and which is allegedly an anomaly for Realism.

Those who employ the historical animosity or ‘psycho-historical’ approach—which is engaged in dispositional explanation of state behaviors—focus on the emotional or psychological conflicts that have developed throughout the long history. Indeed, a ‘history perception gap’ did and does exist as we have witnessed its effects throughout the worsening Korea-Japan relations in 2005. According to one version¹³ of this approach, the Korea-Japan relationship is characterized by a series of “quasi-crises.” These crises result from the ‘history perception gap’ between the two peoples. However, while this approach can describe the unstable baseline of Korea-Japan relations, it cannot explain the change—a series of ups-and-downs, especially the cases of “ups”—in their relations.

In the meantime, the strategic settings—*situational* (environmental or systemic) factors—led Japan and South Korea to align against the threats from the Soviet Union, China and North Korea during the Cold War. As Realists would expect, Japan and South Korea also developed their cooperative relationship under the compelling situation in a bipolar international system. One recent version¹⁴ of this Realist approach, Victor Cha’s quasi-alliance model,¹⁵ by employing Glenn H. Snyder’s theory of alliance politics and the concept of “alliance security dilemma”¹⁶—

Area Studies,” *World Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (July 1974); Chalmers Johnson, and E. B. Keehn, “A Disaster in the Making: Rational Choice and Asian Studies,” *The National Interests* (Summer 1994); David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003); David C. Kang, “Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter 2003/04). For a different view, see Amitar Acharya, “Will Asia’s Past Be Its Future?” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Winter 2003/04).

12. This is not limited to Korea-Japan relations alone. The burdens of history overshadow Japan-Asia relations in general. Masahide Shibusawa, “Japan’s Historical Legacies: Implications for its Relations with Asia,” Richard L. Grant, ed., *The Process of Japanese Foreign Policy: Focus on Asia* (Great Britain: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997).

13. Chung-In Moon, “International Quasi-Crisis: Theory and a Case of Japan-South Korean Bilateral Friction,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1991).

14. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*.

15. Cha defines quasi-alliance as “the relationship between two states that remain unallied despite sharing a common ally.” *Ibid.*, p. 36.

that is, the inverse structure of abandonment/entrapment fears—explains Korea-Japan cooperation/frictions as a function of the U.S. engagement in or disengagement from the Northeast Asian region: When the U.S. disengages from Northeast Asia, there is Korea-Japan cooperation because of their *multilateral* symmetric abandonment fears regarding the U.S.; when the U.S. engages in the region, there is Korea-Japan friction because of their *bilateral* asymmetric abandonment/entrapment fears. The argument implies the final U.S. disengagement from the region will promote Korea-Japan cooperation (against China or North Korea threats). This version of the Realist approach pays exclusive attention to the indirect or unintended consequences of the U.S. engagement/disengagement policy on Korea-Japan relations, while ignoring other multiple or contradictory aspects of U.S. policy.

These two alternative approaches have different implications for U.S. policies towards Northeast Asia and opposite predictions for the prospect of future Korea-Japan relations. The psycho-historical approach regards the elimination of the perception gap between Japan and the ROK as the most important factor in improving bilateral relations. This approach is usually pessimistic about the prospect of the relationship as long as the perception gap between the two peoples remains unchanged, regardless of U.S. engagement or disengagement. Thus, its main concern is to find ways to bridge the bilateral perception gap on history.

Meanwhile, Cha's quasi-alliance model regards the U.S. engagement as a negative force that decreases Korea-Japan cooperative incentives.¹⁷ This approach is optimistic about the prospect of the relationship even without the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia. In this corollary Cha succinctly argues for “gradual finality,” saying, “Explicit but gradual disengagement fosters greater cooperation.”¹⁸

16. Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); idem, “Alliances, Balance, and Stability,” *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter 1991); idem, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1990) (Hereafter “Alliance Theory”); and idem, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984).

17. Cha's quasi-alliance model has intrinsic difficulty in explaining the case of increasing Korea-Japan cooperation when the United States is deeply engaged in the Northeast Asian region and its commitment is strong.

Debunking Misperceptions

Now I will concentrate on debunking such a notion that frictions arising due to historical animosity in Korea-Japan relations are peculiar, irrational, emotionalist, and inconsistent with Realist logic. First, I will argue we should recognize ubiquitous phenomena found in a relationship among neighboring states, which suggests that Korea-Japan frictions are not necessarily caused by irrational emotions alone. Second, I will discuss the nature of historical animosity, which is not unrelated to a rational calculation of national interests. Third, I will also discuss various aspects of U.S. policies and their contradictory effects on Korea-Japan relations, and call analysts' attention to a possible connection between the U.S. intervention in Japanese politics right after World War II and the persistence of historical animosity.

Geography, Cognitive Tendencies, and Korea-Japan Frictions

The geographical closeness between Japan and Korea is often expressed by a Chinese idiom (一依帶水): *irûi taesu* (in Korean) or *ichii taisui* (in Japanese), which means “water as narrow as a belt for a pair of clothes.” The very fact that both peoples use the same phrase suggests they share considerable cultural foundation under the influence of Chinese civilization. Nevertheless, the close geography does not necessarily bring about an amicable relationship in international politics. Rather, frequent contacts may result in various kinds of disputes between the two.

Another set phrase describing the bilateral relationship is “Japan and Korea are close but distant neighbors”: i.e., close in “geography” but distant in “mind.” Both the Japanese and the Koreans often use this cliché as if it were peculiar phenomenon found only in such a particular relationship as theirs. They use this expression when they underline the ‘abnormal’ nature of the bilateral relationship in two respects. First, the two neighboring states ‘should’ be in a good relationship because they are close in geographical terms. Second, the two states with common

18. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, p. 213.

threats under the Cold War situation ‘should’ be more cooperative.

However undesirable it may be, though, it is the prevalent phenomenon that geographical contiguity intensifies the “security dilemma”¹⁹ among neighboring states. Considering the water between Japan and Korea as a “buffer zone” which alleviates the security dilemma, it is no wonder that the proximity of the two distrusting states should make them feel insecure and make it difficult to develop an amicable relationship. Moreover, technological advancement (including weapons technology) will shorten the ‘psychological geography’ further and worsen the security dilemma.²⁰ Therefore, when the two states do not trust each other, it is natural that their relationship should easily deteriorate both due to geographical closeness²¹ and technological advancement as we can see in the checkerboard-like relationship among European continental states in the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, this does not mean every pair of neighboring states is destined to form an adversary relationship. A prominent opposite example will be the U.S.-Canadian relations.²² Germany and France also seem to have overcome their long-time historical animosity, maintaining a relatively good relationship. The German unification itself is an eloquent proof that the German people’s efforts to reconcile with their neighbors were very successful. Otherwise, they would have been faced with insurmountable objections from neighboring states. There are many other examples in EU states. In this sense, we can safely infer that geography never deter-

19. Jervis defines security dilemma as “the fact that most of the ways in which a country seeks to increase its security have the unintended effects of decreasing the security of others.” Robert Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” *World Politics*, Vol. 40 (April 1988), p. 317; Herz originally defines it as “the vicious circle of security and power accumulation.” John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (January 1950), p. 157.

20. For a good discussion of the relationship of technology, geography, and security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 194-199.

21. Another good example other than Korea-Japan relations is Greece-Turkey relationship. For an interesting analysis, Ronald R. Krebs, “Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Spring 1999).

22. The U.S.-Canadian relationship is not free of disputes. A similar fishery dispute also exists between them. However, the Japanese-Korean fishery dispute is easily escalated into other issue areas.

mines state behavior once and for all.

In this light, one of the most important tasks for both Korean and Japanese intellectuals and experts on Korea-Japan relations is to figure out why historical animosity is so persistent and how to overcome it. As some scholars point out, “the argument for a coalition among the three liberal markets still hinged on a traditional strategy of balancing against the socialist bloc and did not actually address the next key question: How can Koreans and Japanese actually resolve historical questions and facilitate their growing need for mutual security cooperation?”²³

It is necessary to see Korea-Japan relations in a broader historical and theoretical perspective, to stop attributing all the wrongdoings to the other side alone, and to consider the possibility that its own side is partially responsible. It is not unusual that both sides are fallible even though each side in the disputes blames the other as the ‘evil’ that is solely responsible. In most cases, Japan and Korea are in a ‘tragic’ situation, which makes it difficult to maintain a friendly relationship. I believe reality is a mixture of ‘evil’ (voluntarism, or dispositional factors) and ‘tragedy’ (determinism, or situational factors).

It is not easy to change the established perspective and way of thinking because scholars and “decision-makers tend to fit incoming information into their existing theories and images”²⁴ and “scholars and decision-makers are apt to err by being too wedded to the established view and too closed to new information, as opposed to being too willing to alter their theories.”²⁵ Both the Japanese and the Koreans should recognize that “there is an overall tendency for decision-makers to see other states as more hostile than they are”²⁶ and that “actors tend to see the behavior of others as more centralized, disciplined, and coordinated than it is.”²⁷ The Korea-Japan relationship is no exception to these biased cognitive tendencies, which still obstruct heartily reconciliation of the two states. However, recognizing these tendencies is, in itself, an important first step to correct the problems.

23. Tae-Hyo Kim and Brad Glosserman, ed., *The Future of U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Balancing Values and Interests* (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2004), p. x.

24. Robert Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” *World Politics*, Vol. 20 (April 1968), p. 455.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

27. *Ibid.*

The examination of a possible influence of geographical closeness and cognitive tendencies on Korea-Japan relations suggests that the continuity of the bilateral friction can be due to other factors than just irrational emotionalism.

Realism of Historical Animosity

To most Realist analysts, volatile fluctuations in Korea-Japan relations are peculiar because the two states have shared common threats. Realism doesn't seem to explain their complicated relations. However, this argument for an anomaly to Realism should be scrutinized. The argument is mostly based on superficial observations and misplaced application of Realist logic.

The long history of Japan-Korea relations tells us the obvious fact that Japan and the ROK (and Korea before 1945) themselves are the two most important states in Korea-Japan relations. This sounds too unintuitive and too simple to be true. However, no matter how important the roles the United States and enemy states (or threats) may play, they have only secondary and indirect influences on Korea-Japan relations. Even though such influences are critically important in shaping the conditions under which the two states interact, neither third parties nor external situations determine the direction of Korea-Japan relations once and for all.

Most Realists have a hard time explaining the Korea-Japan relationship because they pay exclusive attention to the existence of the common threats while overlooking the two states having intrinsic '*conflicts of interest*.' Cooperating against the common threats is in Korea-Japan's interest, but having friction over conflicting interests is also consistent with the Realist logic. Those who employ a 'descriptive-historical' or 'psycho-historical' approach emphasize the overshadowing influence of historical animosity on Korea-Japan relations. This 'traditional' approach, though, has one thing in common with the most recent and sophisticated version of the Realist approach, Cha's quasi-alliance model: Both 'traditionalists' and Cha regard *historical animosity* not only as *irrational emotion* but also as *unrelated to Realpolitik thinking*. The only difference is that the former emphasizes the *continuity*: the negative effect of historical animosity on Korea-Japan relations; while the latter underlines the superiority of his model over the historical animosity lens in explaining the *change* in Korea-Japan relations as a change of

the abandonment/entrapment structure determined by U.S. policies.

The term ‘animosity’ is defined as “a feeling of strong dislike, ill will, or enmity that tends to display itself in action,” and ‘feeling’ is defined as “an emotion or emotional perception or attitude.”²⁸ Accordingly, we may define ‘historical animosity’ as “an emotion or emotional perception or attitude of strong dislike, ill will, or enmity that has historically developed between states and that tends to display itself out in the states’ actions or behaviors.” Thus the word ‘animosity’ itself indicates it is a type of emotion. However, the usual identification of emotion with irrationalism is wrong as most experts on emotion do not regard it as always irrational. Emotion could be rational at least sometimes.²⁹ For instance, when we have in mind Neorealism’s usual assumption of ‘worst case scenario’ in state relations, we may infer that historical animosity erupting in Korea-Japan relations is a reflection on or a warning against the possibility of Japan’s reemergence as a hegemon in Northeast Asia. Then, unlike the usual description, *too much Realism* is the obstacle to Korea-Japan cooperation rather than *too little Realism* (or too much emotionalism).

Let me elaborate my point further by examining an editorial.

In early 1996 when the ROK military forces practiced repelling imaginary enemy vessels around the disputed islets of Dokdo, an editorial of *the Wall Street Journal* severely criticized South Korea’s irrational actions full of “bravado and anger,”³⁰ with the title indicating the South

28. *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996).

29. Neta C. Crawford, “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000); Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); “Rationality and Emotions,” *Economic Journal*, Vol. 106, No. 438 (September 1996); George Ainslie, “Rationality and the Emotions: A Picoeconomic Approach,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985); Jon Elster, “Sadder but Wiser? Rationality and the Emotions,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985); Robert N. Emde, “An Adaptive View of Infant Emotions: Functions for Self and Knowing,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985); Robert I. Levy, “Local Rationality, Ideal Rationality and Emotion,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985); Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, “Varieties of Rationality, Varieties of Emotion,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985); Klaus Scherer, “Emotions Can Be Rational,” *Social Science Information*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985).

30. “Reef Madness,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Editorial, February 15, 1996.

Koreans were in a state of “madness.” Since that many points are academically important and reveal logical traps analysts might easily fall into, I will quote the passage as follows:

A small man, full of bravado and anger, attacks a much bigger opponent, only to find that no matter how hard he hits, the giant just stands there unperturbed and unhurt, gazing calmly down at his weaker adversary.

That ... is what is happening now in East Asia, as Seoul assails Tokyo over a couple of disputed islets in the Sea of Japan. ... *Together, South Korea and Japan are the world’s first line of defense against the dangerous regime in Pyongyang.* ... [T]he thought of Seoul sending a mini-armada and snarling jets out to the tiny dots they call the Dokto islands today to rattle sabers at Japan is not a comforting one.

What is very encouraging ... is Tokyo’s handling of the issue since it blew up a few days ago. *Japan’s calm and dignified response to South Korean taunts, and its diplomatic efforts to dampen the dispute, are the marks of a mature nation.* ... Japan has an opportunity here to prove to don the robe of *regional senior statesman.* ...

Ever since Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda referred to the isles as Japanese “sovereign territory,” he has been at the center of a huge storm of anti-Japanese protest and volatile official rhetoric in South Korea. Waves of knife-bearing Koreans—including ex-“comfort women” once forced into prostitution by the World War Japanese army—have been deployed to shred effigies of the minister. ...

... Given the *seriousness of Korea’s strategic situation*, however, *a government in a normal mode would have taken every step possible to avoid any serious damage to relations with an important neighbor.*

That role has been left to Tokyo, which has ... kept a level head. ... Criticize Japan for staking a claim to this site if you like, but the fact is that *if Tokyo didn’t do it first, South Korea would have later.* ... It may be true, as the British maritime strategist Julian Corbett once observed, that island warfare is a relatively safe and harmless way for countries to *let off steam and act out nationalist urges* without hurting many people in the process. ... [emphasis mine]

First, the editorial reveals one of the problems of Realism: namely, it is both prescriptive and descriptive. The author, evidently applying a Realist strategic logic, *describes* that “South Korea and Japan are the world’s first line of defense against the dangerous regime in Pyongyang,” implying that it is natural for the ROK to behave more amicably towards Japan. It continues

that the ROK government and people alike were neither “mature” nor “normal” at the time of the incident because they didn’t seem to act upon Realist logic. It also *prescribes* that the ROK should behave rationally like the “calm” and “dignified” Japanese government. However, this incident itself would evidence that Realism is not always a good guide to understanding, explaining, and predicting states’ behavior. According to Realism, South Korea should have avoided confronting Japan because they were strategic partners against the common threat from North Korea.

The editorial has fallen into such a logical trap as Jervis once put it: “Many Realist scholars develop arguments that are both descriptive and prescriptive. They claim not only to analyze the way the world works, but also to guide statesmen. However, they often pay insufficient attention to the question of whether their theories will be accurate if statesmen do not accept them (and if statesmen do, then prescription is unnecessary) and the possibility that if their truths were generally believed, the patterns of behavior would be altered.”³¹

Second, scholars tend to either overestimate or underestimate the importance of historical animosity. On the one hand, Realist scholars often underestimate the importance of the Dokdo issue so that the discrepancy between the reality and Realism may look like an infinitesimal one. On the other hand, those who employ an historical animosity lens often make light of Realism’s explanatory power by overestimating the importance of the territorial dispute that they regard as a facet of deep-seated historical animosity. Neither of them, however, pays enough attention to the importance of the territorial disputes in line with *Realpolitik* calculation.

For instance, Cha comments on the territorial dispute over the Dokdo islets as follows,

[T]he island has been claimed historically by each government as its rightful territory. Composed of two half-submerged rock outcroppings, Tokto has *no* natural resources or *strategic value* other than as a docking point for fisherman. Despite this, nationalist *sentiment* was so strong that the two governments could not reach an amicable settlement in the 1965 normalization treaty and left the issue unresolved.³²

31. Robert Jervis, “The Future of World Politics: Will It Resemble the Past?” *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Winter 1991/92), p. 41

32. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, p. 158.

[I]n 1981 the ROK protested a *relatively insignificant incident* involving Japanese patrol boats docking on the island. In 1983 Japan filed counterprotests over Korean fishermen illegally occupying the island. As one analyst *correctly stated*, “Neither the Japanese nor the South Korean government refers to Tokto or Takeshima when their relations are cordial.”³³ [emphasis mine]

At this juncture, it should be noticed that Dokdo is to the Koreans a symbol of *national interest* and *national prestige*. Any part of a state’s territory is strategically important to its own people for the maintenance of its *territorial integrity*, which is the Realist first priority in the pursuit of national interest. Dokdo is also a symbol of *national independence*: Koreans are determined to defend Dokdo all the more because Japan’s claim to the island is based on the fact that it was forcefully incorporated into the Japanese territory in 1905, when Korea was deprived of its diplomatic sovereignty by Japan. Colonial experience is such a physical and moral humiliation to the Koreans that the ‘Never again’ syndrome is strong especially towards Japan. Therefore, Dokdo should not be seen as just a matter of sentiment or emotion. It is fundamentally a matter of defending intrinsic national interest at least to the ROK. Therefore, the dispute on Dokdo is a proof of the validity of Realism, not a disproof. Moreover, it is like ‘putting the cart before the horse’ to argue that “Neither the Japanese nor the South Korean government refers to Tokto or Takeshima when their relations are cordial.”³⁴ The truth is that their relations become disturbed when the dispute on Dokdo is saliently politicized, while their relations become cordial when it is not politicized. The ROK government never raises the issue of Dokdo first as long as Japan does not challenge what South Korea regards as a *fait accompli*, which is unlike the editorial’s misstatement that “if Tokyo didn’t do it first, South Korea would have later.” The ROK mentions the Dokdo issue for counter-argument only in response to Japan’s first move. Therefore, either the traditionalists’ citing of the issue of Dokdo as an example of disproving Realism or Cha’s citing of it as an insignificant fuss is *wrong in light of Realism*.

Third, the editorial argues that the ROK’s irrational, immature, and emotional behavior that erupted around the territorial issue are “to let off steam and act out nationalist urges.” Many

33. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

34. Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea*, p. 120.

scholars and journalists resort to this line of argument for a domestic abuse of the territorial issue to enhance the political legitimacy of the regime. It is probably true that at least sometimes both governments can benefit from their rising popularity as a result of instigating nationalistic fervor among constituencies. However, we shouldn't overlook the fact that those issues did not come to exist because of the politicians' manipulation for domestic purposes. Moreover, those are much more complicated issues than we usually assume; most of them are moral/normative issues as well as emotional/*Realpolitik* issues.

It is not only hard to start a cooperative relation, but also difficult to expand the hard-won cooperation without first narrowing the perception gaps on issues related to morality or norm.³⁵ It is most difficult to agree on such bilateral issues as involve Realist concerns, normative values, and national prestige at the same time. In the analysis of such complicated issues, it seems to be pointless to insist that either Realist concern or normative concern is more important than the other. These kinds of complicated issues in Korea-Japan relations include property claims, fishery problems, the legal status and treatment of Korean residents in Japan, and the problem of title to Dokdo islets, etc., which are usually and mistakenly attributed to historical animosity alone just because they have developed against a long historical backdrop. However, these issues are *never* a matter of emotional confrontation alone.³⁶ They are *Realpolitik* issues laden with emotional baggage.

Finally, the editorial argues the ROK government strongly protesting against Japan's claim for sovereignty over the territorial issue is not in a "normal mode" because it ignores the "seriousness of Korea's strategic situation." However, Japan is also partially responsible for creating such a condition that makes Korea-Japan security cooperation difficult. It's not because the ROK is irrationally emotional while Japan is maturely involved in strategic calculation, but because the ROK is, in its own strategic thinking, concerned about the possibility that the unfortunate past will be repeated.

35. For a good discussion of moral aspect of international politics, see Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

36. For detailed discussions of the issues, see Kwan Bong Kim, *The Korea-Japan Treaty Crisis and the Instability of the Korean Political System* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), pp. 40-77.

It also seems that ‘historical animosity’ has often *amplified* the level of the disputes that are *not* directly related to historical animosity itself. This misled many observers to conclude it is historical animosity (or emotion), rather than self-interest (or rationality), that determines Korea-Japan relations. Indeed, many contingent disputes between the two states are at least remotely or partially related to historical legacies or perception gaps on history.

However, Realist theory, more broadly understood, is not necessarily diametrically opposed to the traditional ‘psycho-historical’ approach. A Realist theory, especially Stephen Walt’s balance-of-threat theory,³⁷ emphasizes the importance of perceived threats in alliance formation, one of whose components is the aggressive intentions of the other states.³⁸ Although Walt clearly announces himself as a Realist, he departs from Neorealist emphasis on states’ capabilities in the absence of crystal-clear criteria of judging the intentions of states. As Wendt points out, in an important revision of Walt’s theory, Stephen Walt implies threats are socially constructed.³⁹ In Walt’s balance-of-threat theory, perceived threat is mainly determined by whether perceived intentions of other states are aggressive or not. In this process of defining a state’s perceptions on other states’ threats and intentions, historical experience or the history of reciprocity could play a significant role. As it were, traditional balance-of-power theory identifies threat with capabilities without seriously considering the process of identity (enemy or friend) formation. Meanwhile, in balance-of-threat theory, perception is very important.

The process of forming perceptions is fundamentally an “intersubjective” one. As Inis Claude once pointed out, “mistrust is directed not against power per se, but against particular holders of power”; “the *identity* of the preponderant power is a significant determinant of the

37. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987); see also Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation in Southwest Asia: Balancing and Bandwagoning in Cold War competition,” Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, ed., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

38. According to Walt, “The degree to which a state threatens others is the product of its aggregate power, its geographical proximity, its offensive capabilities, and the aggressiveness of its intentions.” *Walt, The Origins of Alliances*, pp. 22, 265.

39. Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 396.

attitudes of weaker states” towards the former; and “the tolerability of inferiority heavily depends on assessment of the *motives, morals, and purposes* of the superior.” Statesmen usually shape their reactions to the power of other states in accordance with their answers to the question “*What are they likely to do with their power?*” as well as to the question “*How much power do they have?*” The strongest is not necessarily the one against whose attack precautions should be taken.⁴⁰ In this light, in the process of assessing the motives, morals and purposes of the Japanese state (or the Korean state), the management of historical animosity between Japan and South Korea will play an important role in qualitative evaluation of their relationship.

In short, if balance-of-threat theory determines state action, history also matters because “threats are socially constructed”⁴¹ (through the social relationship among states) against the background of historical experience or the interaction of a state with other states. Therefore, we can argue that the Realist approach and the “psycho-historical” approach are perfectly compatible and complementary. Although during the Cold War and thereafter the Korea-Japan relationship has been greatly influenced by systemic factors—the existence of a common threat and U.S. engagement/disengagement, if the common threat disappears, it is possible that the enemy/friend identity between Japan and Korea can be remolded. In this process of forming a new identity, Korea-Japan relations would be largely determined by how skillfully the problem of historical animosity is managed by the decision-makers of the two states. However, it is indeed unfortunate for the regional stability and peace that Japan, “the senior regional statesman” as the editorial calls it, does not have heart-to-heart friends among neighbors. Although the editorial argues that Tokyo’s handling of the issue is very encouraging, it is very discouraging for the future stability in the Northeast Asian region that Japan has territorial disputes with all its neighbors: Korea, China, Russia, and Taiwan, which they perceive are mostly the result of Japan’s past imperialistic and militaristic policies.

In the next section I will address various aspects of U.S. policies, one of which is related to the U.S. role in exacerbating (or abating) historical animosity between Japan and the ROK.

40. Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 64-65.

41. Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” p. 396.

The U.S. Role: Important but Not Determinant

One of the most important events in Korea-Japan relations is their diplomatic normalization. It took them twenty years to open the diplomatic door. Cha emphasizes the critical importance of the U.S. role in 1965 Korea-Japan diplomatic normalization.⁴² The pressure undeniably facilitated the final achievement of Korea-Japan normalization after the longtime mutual recriminations. However, as Cha's main concern is to *explain* changes in Korea-Japan relations *systematically* within a single theoretical framework, I am therefore keenly interested in whether he is actually using his own theory to explain one of the most important desirable changes in Korea-Japan relations. Regrettably, however, the normalization case doesn't fit the quasi-alliance model. On the contrary, the case invalidates his model. He argues, "[t]he normalization treaty sheds light on the difficulties of using historical-animosity and leadership variables to explain conflict and cooperation in Korea-Japan relations."⁴³ Meanwhile, Cha states, "the principal characteristic of the model is its emphasis on *policies of the United States* as a key causal determinant of changes in Korea-Japan bilateral behavior."⁴⁴ However, 'policies of the United States' is too unspecified a term to be a variable, although Cha later clarifies that "the independent variable is *abandonment/entrapment structures*"⁴⁵ and that "*Japan's and the ROK's fears of being abandoned or entrapped* in their quasi-alliance relationship is a key causal variable for policy outcomes."⁴⁶ All considered, it is clear that the U.S. policy Cha incorporates as the key causal variable into his model is not all the aspects of U.S. policy. The focus is on the unintended effects on Korea-Japan relations by the strengthening or weakening U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and/or Japan.

As shown in the 1965 Korea-Japan normalization process, the intensifying U.S. pressure for Japan and South Korea to improve bilateral relations, share burdens, and strengthen solidarity

42. Cha, "Bridging the Gap"

43. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, p. 34.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

among the three against the communist threats is not necessarily accompanied by a weakening U.S. commitment. Rather, such pressure indicates that the United States is seeking willful (intended) policy coordination to strengthen the weakest leg of the triangular security tripod. In this case the concern for the U.S. is not *whether to engage*, but *how to engage*. This sort of U.S. pressure, which doesn't necessarily heighten Korea-Japan's abandonment fears acutely, was a critical facilitator in achieving the most difficult task of opening the diplomatic door. Thus the normalization case suggests that the United States should *engage wisely* if it does engage at all, and *not* that it should *disengage* from Northeast Asia.

However, U.S. policies could have more complicated and contradictory effects on Korea-Japan relations than we usually imagine. Logically speaking, in the context of Korea-Japan relations, both the common threats and U.S. engagement could have contradictory effects.

First, the common threats may cause two contradictory outcomes. If external common threats increase, Korea-Japan's cooperative incentives might increase (*External common threat* → *Korea-Japan cooperation*). This co-relationship is consistent with the Realist logic of balancing. However, although Japan had agreed to form a security pact with the United States, it tried to avoid being deeply involved in the Cold War politics as much as possible. Despite U.S. opposition, Japan maintained a certain level of economic or private contacts with all its communist neighbors—the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea—by adopting the so-called policy of *seikei bunri* (政經分離/"separation of politics and economics"). This policy led South Korea—which was engaged in fierce competition with North Korea—to see Japan as immorally opportunistic, which often resulted in diplomatic rows in Korea-Japan relations. This kind of Korea-Japan friction should not be attributed to historical animosity; rather, it is an outcome of 'conflict of interests.' Different grand strategies of the two states, accompanied by the usual gaps of threat perceptions, could not but create a certain degrees of friction.

Second, if the increase of external threats has the effect of keeping or increasing the level of U.S. engagement, Korea-Japan cooperative incentives might decrease by increasing Korea-Japan's free-riding tendency (*External threat* → *U.S. engagement* → *Korea-Japan's free-riding* → *Korea-Japan friction*). This co-relationship is not consistent with the conventional Realist logic of balancing. Here collective goods logic works. Cha's quasi-alliance model focuses on

this causality of *unintended* consequences of the U.S. policies. Instead of utilizing the concept of “free riding,” Cha uses the concept of *asymmetric bilateral abandonment/entrapment structure*. It is at least theoretically possible that Japan and the ROK might have developed much stronger security ties if each hadn’t concluded a security treaty with the United States. Japan and the ROK could afford to “fight” because of the security guarantee from the United States.

Third, U.S. engagement could have a positive effect on Korea-Japan cooperation too. The increased U.S. engagement might motivate the United States to play a more positive leadership role as a mediator pressuring Japan and South Korea to cooperate (*External threat* → *U.S. engagement* → *U.S. pressure* → *Korea-Japan cooperation*). This co-relationship is consistent with the conventional Realist logic of balancing. Here the focus is on the *intended* consequence of U.S. policies. Meanwhile, the collective-goods-theory version of the Realist approach like Cha’s quasi-alliance model regards the U.S. engagement as a negative force that decreases Korea-Japan cooperative incentives.

Fourth, as Cha points out, Japan and the ROK have *symmetric* abandonment fears regarding U.S. disengagement from the Northeast Asian region, which encourages Japanese-ROK cooperation (*U.S. disengagement* → *Korea-Japan’s symmetric abandonment fears regarding the United States* → *Korea-Japan cooperation*). This co-relationship is consistent with collective goods logic, which is adopted by Cha’s quasi-alliance model. However, the causal mechanism of ‘Korea-Japan’s symmetric abandonment fears regarding the United States’ might be actually redundant in explaining Korea-Japan cooperation if we infer that *Korea-Japan’s free-riding tendency* will go away when the United States disengages from the region.

Fifth, in case of the U.S. disengagement from the region, besides Korea-Japan *symmetric* abandonment fears regarding the United States, there could be different fears. The persistent historical animosity could lead the ROK, facing U.S. disengagement, to have other kinds of *asymmetric* fears of the resultant collapse of the “double containment”⁴⁷ mechanism not only

47. A state may ally with another to gain influence over the ally and restrain it from taking certain actions that might be contrary to the first state’s interests. Jack S. Levy and Michael Barnett, “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignment: the Case of Egypt, 1962-73,” *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 1991), p. 371. For the role of the U.S.-Japanese security treaty as a mechanism for “containing”

against common external threats but also against *Japan* itself. These latter kinds of South Korean fears, by deepening the ROK's "adversary security dilemma" (Herz and Jervis's and not Glenn Snyder's) toward Japan, might increase Korea-Japan friction (*U.S. disengagement* → *Collapse of containment mechanism against Japan* → *the ROK's intensifying adversary "security dilemma" towards Japan* → *Korea-Japan friction*).

Sixth, and finally, the causal roles of common threats and the U.S. engagement suggest that Realist theory focusing on "material" power can be useful. In the meantime, the causal roles of *perceived* common threats and historical animosity indicate that "intersubjective meanings" of the relationship, which influence the process of identity/interest formation, are also important.⁴⁸ However, in reality, material factors and intersubjectives factors may not be inseparable.

Regarding Korea-Japan historical animosity, we can figure out a possible role the United States played right after the war. Some people might wonder why Japan, unlike Germany, has been so reluctant or slow to admit its war crimes in the past. More accurately speaking, it is the Japanese conservatives that have been reluctant to take responsibility for the wrongdoings inflicted upon the neighboring states during World War II, which still makes it difficult for Japan to get respect from the neighboring states due to the perception gap on history.

The persistent conservative rule in Japanese domestic politics was in turn helped by the U.S. occupation authority's "reversal" of the policy direction from demilitarization and democratization of Japan towards strengthening of Japan as a Cold War bulwark against the communist states. Accordingly, the United States helped the conservative political forces—Liberal Democratic Party—to rule Japan for a long time.

Japan, see Mike M. Mochizuki, "To Change or to Contain: Dilemmas of American Policy Toward Japan," Oye, Lieber and Rothchild, ed., *Eagle in a New World* (HarperCollins Publisher, 1992); Hans Maull, "Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1990/91), p. 93: He sees that one of the purposes of the U.S.-Japanese Security Treaty was to "keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Japanese down." Betts also recognizes that "the security guarantee ... allowed Japan to remain militarily limited," arguing that "as long as possible" the U.S. should not demand genuine military reciprocity from Japan." Richard Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 55-56.

48. Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (June 1994); See also Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It"

In short, the U.S. intervention in Northeast Asian regional politics, though originally intended to promote security cooperation among the anti-communist states, probably has had a long-term negative effect on the process of reconciliation between Japan and other states, including South Korea (*External threat* → *U.S. engagement* → *U.S. intervention in Japanese politics* → *Japan under the rule of conservative political forces* → *Perception gap on history* + **historical animosity** → *No reconciliation between Japan and neighboring states* → *Korea-Japan friction*).

As we have shown, the U.S. role in Korea-Japan relations has been undeniably important but not a determinant because the effects of U.S. engagement/disengagement on Korea-Japan relations are various and contradictory to each other. The U.S. role seen as part of a trilateral alliance (or alignment) relationship is much more complex than a simple bilateral relationship. In a nutshell, without considering these multiple effects, the desirable short-term direction of U.S. policy cannot be determined. Even the same policy line can be either stabilizing or destabilizing depending on concrete situations. For instance, whether or not trust prevails between and among states in the Northeast Asian region will determine the sort of effect of U.S. policies on Korea-Japan relations and other bilateral relations. However, how to build trust between and among states in the region is another big topic that I cannot deal with in this short article.

Conclusion

The sound analysis of the Korea-Japan relationship has both theoretical and practical implications significant for the attainment of stability in the Northeast Asian region and for a desirable direction for U.S. security policy towards this region. Each of the two alternative approaches calls our attention to only a partial aspect of Korea-Japan relations. While the historical animosity approach focuses on conflictive aspects alone with cooperative aspects unexplained, Cha's quasi-alliance model—based on “discrete or parochial realism” as I would term it—focuses on the unintended consequences of the U.S. policies of engagement or disengagement with the intended consequences of the three states' willful policy coordination ignored. Cha criticizes

that “scholars and practitioners have grown accustomed to throwing up their hands in frustration and blaming historical animosity,” and he argues that “[t]his has become a stale and over-utilized argument.”⁴⁹ However, in analyzing Korea-Japan relations, Cha, not unlike those who employ historical animosity alone, makes the same mistake of running the risk of “putting all his eggs in one basket” in the sense that he tries to explain too much with a single variable: the policies of the United States.

Conclusively, we need to recognize not only various aspects of U.S. policies with their contradictory effects on Korea-Japan relations but also the Realism—*Realpolitik* nature—of historical animosity. At a general level, historical animosity is not just a matter of irrational emotionalism. The persistence of historical animosity itself, at least *partially*, reflects either a state’s Realist consideration of its national interest and/or its conflicting interests with the other state(s).

In a specific context, I argue, we can properly explain or understand Korea-Japan relations only when we overcome the tendency for dichotomization in the scholarship on Korea-Japan relations that prevents researchers from grasping reality. When we overcome this tendency and understand historical animosity as inseparably intertwined with *Realpolitik*, it is possible to explain the seemingly idiosyncratic Korea-Japan relations in a systemic and theoretical way.

49. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, p. 5.

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